THE
RECONSTRUCTIONIST

DEDICATED TO THE ADVANCEMENT OF JUDAISM AS A RELIGIOUS CIVILIZATION, TO THE UPBUILDING OF ISRAEL'S ANCIENT HOMELAND, AND TO THE FURTHERANCE OF UNIVERSAL FREEDOM, JUSTICE AND PEACE.

Vol. III. January 28, 1938 Shebat 16, 5698 No. 19.

EDITORIALS

THE COUNCIL OF JEWISH FEDERATIONS AND WELFARE FUNDS
COMMUNITY SUPPORT OF RECONSTRUCTIONISM

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ZALMAN SCHNEUR

By Menahem Ribalow

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RECONSTRUCTING THE JEWISH PAST

By Eugene Kohn

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CORRESPONDENCE

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EDITORIALS

The Council of Jewish Federation and Welfare Funds

THE annual General Assembly of the Council of Jewish Federations and Welfare Funds held in Cincinnati January 8, 9, and 10, revealed how remarkably the Council is being transformed from year to year. The transformation of the Council is itself an indication of the changes taking place in community organization and control in Jewish life in this country. The Council, including as it does, representation from over one hundred Federations and Welfare Funds from almost as many cities is fast becoming the most powerful single organization of Jews in this country. For, as Vladeck pointed out at one of the meetings, the agencies represented in the Council collect and disburse annually anywhere from thirty to fifty million dollars. To be sure the Council itself does not control the agencies invited to the General Assembly, but nevertheless it does exert a considerable influence upon the constituent organizations, and the individual delegates to the General Assembly control the policies of the organizations included in the Council.

The most heartening thing about the Assembly in Cincinnati was the evidence adduced of the growth in the number of community councils all over the country. At one of the sessions a report was read of a survey made of twenty Jewish Community Councils. This survey may have disclosed that there were wide divergences in organization, function, membership, and philosophy among the various Jewish community councils, but it also proved how general and widespread was the belief in the Community Council approach. Speaker after speaker voiced the thought that the Federation was undemocratic in its setup and too parochial in its interest; that the Federation would have to transform itself into an organ of the entire Jewish communty or give way to Jewish Community Councils representative of all of the organizations within the Jewish community, and itself become merely one of the organizations within a Community Council. This thought was expressed and urged not only by educators and representatives of Community Councils but by Federation men and women as well.

It is this growth of the community idea and the increase in the number of Community Councils which are affecting the work of the Council of Jewish Federations and Welfare Funds and causing it to modify its program. The Council has merely taken cognizance of a trend which antidates its own appearance on the American Jewish scene, and is falling in

line, ready to be responsive to the new needs and requirements of Jewish life in this country. It has now begun to provide field representatives who are ready at all times to assist local communities in organizing Community Councils.

We now have not only the Council, but the Jewish Welfare Board, the American Jewish Congress, and other organizations as well, actively engaged in helping organize Community Councils.

In keeping with the Community Council idea the Council itself is trying to become more representative of Jewish life in this country. The program of the General Assembly in Cincinnati reflected this desire to include elements and points of view which had not been given adequate expression in previous assemblies. Although there were assimilationists among the delegates, the so-called assimilationist point of view was conspicuously absent in the addresses delivered at the various sessions. The assimilationists of yesteryear, though still opposed to a Jewish state, and to what they call ghetto exclusiveness, stood on a "survival" platform and talked quite glibly about the development of Jewish cultural life in this country. The biggest ovations were received by Dr. Solomon Goldman who castigated the Jews in this country for their timidity, for their feeling of inferiority, and who demanded the development of a full national Jewish life not only in Palestine but in this country as well; by Dr. Abba Hillel Silver who gave a realistic description of the present situation in Palestine and who made a stirring appeal for continued support of Palestine and the United Palestine Appeal by all sections of Jewry; and by B. Charney Vladeck who showed that labor was the only organized group which stood as a bulwark against anti-Semitism and fascism in every country and that only in alliance with Jewish labor and general labor movements could the Jews of America be saved. In fact, the only institution not represented in Cincinnati was the synagogue. And except for the short talk of Professor Louis Finkelstein, no voice on behalf of religion and the synagogue was raised. It seems to be taken for granted that Religion and the Synagogue are matters which concern only the individual, and individual congregations, while the Council of Federations and Welfare Funds as well as the Community Councils are trying to get together on things in which the whole Jewish community is interested, that is, all things outside the Synagogue.

The organization of the Council of Jewish Federations and Welfare Funds is still amorphous and has not changed in comformity with the changing interests of its constituent organizations. Although the officers and the members of the executive committee are approved by the delegates at a business meeting, they are in no sense elected by them. A small nominating committee handpicks the slate, and the slate is approved without opposition by the delegates assembled. The reason given for this oligarchic method of control is that the Council is a conferring and discussing body and not a body of duly elected representatives with power to act for anybody; that individuals are united as individuals and not as duly elected delegates.

This may be partly true, but in part it is a legend. The Council does, for example, have field representatives who offer their services to local Jewish communities in many capacities. No matter how hard they try to be objective, they do give advice on the basis of some well-defined policy. They thus do exert influence over the organization and control of Jewish life. But even if the Council were only a conferring body, that should not prevent it from being democratically organized. The question of formal representation of functional groups on the executive committee of the Council has come up for discussion a number of times, but action has been postponed from year to year. In Cincinnati a definite promise was made that the whole subject would be reviewed in 1938 and discussed thorough-

ly at the 1939 General Assembly. Because delegates were invited on an individual basis, many of them, particularly those representing Community Councils, have not given much thought to the question of the representative character of the Council itself. Most of the local Community Councils are so little affected by the Council that the problem does not bother them.

It is a problem, however, which should be of concern to them. The Council is bound to increase in importance and power. The very presence of representatives of the Community Councils will help increase the importance of the Council. It is the duty of *Reconstructionists* to work for and support Community Councils in their own communities and to see to it that representatives of the Community Council sent to the meetings of the General Assemblies of the Council of Federations and Welfare Funds demand that this Council transform itself into a democratic body which should include all organizations that have a positive Jewish program.

Community Support of Reconstructionism

THIS year ninety Federations and Welfare Funds, in seventy-five Jewish communities, embracing eighty-two per cent of the Jewish population of the United States will be raising over $14,000,000 for local, national and overseas services. Since the organization of the first Welfare Fund in Oakland, California in 1925, many communities have developed this instrument as a means of eliminating the bewildering number of separate appeals and separate drives for non-local causes. These Welfare Funds are objective evidence of the recognized obligations of Jewish communities to support educational and cultural agencies such as the Jewish Welfare Board, the B'nai B'rith Wider Scope Committee (Hillel Foundations and A.Z.A.), Avukah, Graduate School for Jewish Social Work, Chautauqua Society, Jewish Education Associations, Hakhshara, Histadruth Ivrit, Jewish Publication Society, the Jewish Teachers Seminary and various rabbinical colleges and Yeshivas in this and foreign countries. In addition to the interest in educational and cultural agencies, contributions are also provided for relief, medical services, immigration, civic and protective work, coordination and research, the Joint Distribution Committee, the Zionist Organization of America, Keren Hayesod and the Jewish National Fund. Some Welfare Funds also provide for the support of non-Jewish organizations such as the National Education Association, the Non-Sectarian Anti-Nazi League, the National Committee to Aid Victims of Fascism, the National Conference of Social Work, Friends of Europe, etc.

In reviewing the interests of these Welfare Funds, it is very obvious that the array of subventioned organizations varies amazingly from community to community. Another startling fact is that there seems to be no logic or consistency in the relative amounts allotted to the sundry organizations, either from year to year, or between one community and another. Although efforts have been made to bring some sense, order and system into the procedures which determine which organizations shall be supported and by what relative amounts, we find the situation governed entirely by a distinct local community "rugged individualism." The result is inevitable: some causes receive no support, and others more than their proportionate share, by any standard.

Ideally Welfare Funds should help to underwrite all national enterprises which are dependent on voluntary contributions and which attempt to promote Jewish social welfare, advance Jewish education and make Jewish life richer and more meaningful. When such cultural and ed-

ucational media as the Menorah Association, A. Z. A., Hillel Foundations, Avukah, Young Judaea and others receive community subventions, the *Reconstructionist* Movement ought not to be omitted.

The Aurora, Illinois Jewish community is to be congratulated for in its recent "Jewish Community Drive" it recognized the program and the activities of the *Reconstructionist* Movement and made a contribution toward its encouragement and support. We are not concerned so much by the amount of any community's contribution. We are much more interested in securing a wider recognition of the fact that our interest in the reconstruction and the reorganization of the content, the internal operation and the direction of Jewish life in America, deserves some measure of understanding and support by American Jewry.

Those who are familiar with the nature and content of this periodical, with the literature produced by the exponents of Reconstructionism, with the forums and study groups inspired by the *Reconsructionist* Movement will undoubtedly agree that the interests of a positive and creative Jewish life would be well served by the support of this movement.

We hope that the example which Aurora has set will shortly be duplicated in other sections of the country where a genuine interest exists for making Jewish life richer and nobler, a blessing to ourselves and to our neighbors.

Zalman Schneur*

By Menahem Ribalow**

HUNGER and thirst—these are the instinctual drives in Schneur's soul. Impelled by these powerful forces he strives and builds, destroys and creates. He also affects us and the world about him.

Already in his first poem "If Not For My Hopes" he writes of this hunger. And in "Thirsty We Shall Go Out In The Morning" (written in 1903) he sings: "Thirsty we go out into the morning, thirsty for sunshine and we are ready to devour the sun from the skies in our gigantic hunger." In many of his poems even before he displays his hunger, he proclaims it. He defies fences and marked-off flower-beds. In his hunger he refuses to listen to the mumblings of invalids, for the fruit of life is ripe and ready for the taking. Senile guardians of law and limitation know only one thing—"Don't! It is forbidden!"

He hates the venerable and the respectable, bourgeois mannikins and precious little souls. He insists on collecting what is due him from life—joy and love.

When he talks of joy and love and happiness, he is not indulging in poetic figurative speech but aims at reality, at the truth which is the basis of his poetry. He aims at youthful joy and human happiness and earthly love. Infinity itself is too narrow for him, without love; and without the eternal feminine the mountain air is dull and dreary. That is why he wants to strike a spark out of every woman, and issue his command: Love! The theft of his youth lies hidden in the lap of the daughter of Eve, in the lips of woman.

As soon as he touches woman his desires are transmuted into a consuming fire, into a glowing eroticism that was not only new but daring. It is only the incandescent Hebrew language, the language

*Schneur's 50th birthday is now being celebrated. This distinguished Hebrew poet now resides in Paris.

**Mr. Ribalow is editor of *Hadoar,* the Hebrew weekly.

that has bottled up in it the elemental force of the primitive Hebrew spirit that could bridle the unsubdued spirit of this intoxicated, sinning and singing poet.

This explains why he, the city poet, the poet of culture and modernity, the poet of today and tomorrow is also the poet of dim, distant yesterday, the poet of the primitive soul. He will not neglect any opportunity to contrast frail, enervated man, product of contemporary civilization, with the strong, powerful, primitive specimen of the past, product of the desert. His symbol of the true man is Adam, his embodiment of essential woman is Eve. He longs for the freedom of the desert and the jungle, and dreams of the days when, naked, sun-drenched Eve would wander abroad in quest of her beloved in the mountains.

ברוכה לי תהיי, את פראות חפשיה
של תקופת מדבריות ויערים!
עת נדה בת־חוה ערומה ושזופה
ובקשה את דודה בהרים.

When he contrasts the sacrifice of the savage with the offering of the artist (as in „תקופות" "Epochs"), he asserts that the first was a powerful expression of primitive belief, fear, and love, the burning ecstasy of one who completely forgot all for the sake of God, while the second is but a pale, attenuated reflection of beauty.

„ואל הזוהר נכלם מאוד"

—"The God of light was mortified," says the poet. Not God alone was mortified.

He hates duplicity and external glitter. He delights in tearing away masks and veils. The sight of a mask or a cloak infuriates him. He strives after nakedness both of body and of spirit.

קום גול וקרע השמלה והגה כל החידה!

Rend the garment and the riddle will out!

But he does not stop there. The human species, even the most primitive human, is altogether too soft. To find real prowess, primal passions, untamed and unbridled, one must go to the unspoiled beast, faithful preservers of uncontaminated instincts and impulses. When he stands in the zoological garden and watches a love scene betwen lion and lioness, he is transported back to the jungle, the true source of devouring love and consuming passion. The lioness still possesses feminine tenderness; affection still flows through her limbs; she yields to her lord, and majesty gives way to the eternal feminine. She seems to beg for love as a captive begs for a drop of water to moisten his parched throat. Oh, sweet, sweet thirst! But the lion, although in captivity, paces in his cage a still unsubdued force, his paws and his nostrils, his mouth and his eyes, his muscles and his mane—all reminiscent of the desert.

Schneur admires the devourer and despises the devoured. He stands with the lions, the leopards, the wolves, the panthers and shares their disdain for the sheep and the lamb, the innocent creatures whose ultimate destiny is to be devoured, to be swallowed up by the strong. Even thoughts and ideas he divides into two categories, wolf-ideas and sheep-ideas. („זאב המחשבה" — „מחשבות שיות")

He lauds Spartacus for having aroused the inertia of the slaves who were ready to die the death of rats in a trap on fire. "If not for you," he addresses Spartacus, "who knows where I would have been today, I, a child of a vanquished people." He delineates a world of cruelty and annihilation, of hatred and destruction, a world-arena where, instead of gladiators, we see artists wrestling for bread, and pale-faced geniuses striving for a mere foothold. The choice seats in the circus go to the rotund-bellied and to those whose hearts are gross with fat, whose triple-folded chins quiver with chuckling, and whose fingers, jeweled and diamonded, indicate: The victor—The vanquished!

In this world-circus disarmed peoples, and among them the Jews, wrestle before the eyes of heavily-armed rulers who sit there watching and do their so-called religious duty by groaning—the old, shriveled wenches!

Thus, he looks with hope and faith, with admiration and awe at the image of

the incorrigible insurgent, Spartacus, for of him it is written: "Revolt, revolt, endlessly revolt."

„להתקומם ולהתקומם עד אין תכלה!"

This is the secret of man's desire and his spiritual hunger. Every doctrine is a station for generations in transit. Every truth is but a flimsy tent, pitched by world-wanderers.

The gods are the light-towers in the nights of the world. Each is distant from the other; each is of a different tint and color; and the light of one fails to reach the light of the other.

And for the seeker—the poem has the following exhortation, "Get thee a lodging for the night in one of these temporary tents of truth and on the morrow arise with dawn, leave the tent behind thee and hasten onward, ever, ever onward till you reach a second resting-place and from there to a third onward, onward. . . ."

He describes the same driving force, the same impetus sometimes as hunger, sometimes as thirst, in the guise of love or hate, belief or unbelief. This is the source of Schneur's inner contradictions in which he is so hopelessly entangled and in whose meshes he is caught like one in captivity. Such contradictions always beset one who has wings but cannot fly, or is not permitted to fly. Such are the sufferings of one who finds himself shackled by external forces, one in whose veins the hot blood of the Orient seethes, and yet is doomed to freeze in the Hyperborean cold, one who would be a creator, an innovator, but is an heir burdened with a legacy which he is doomed to transmit.

"The Legend of the Duck" is the tale of people who were once in possession of wings but whose stomachs betrayed them. Hunger broke their wings. It gives him joy to put himself, the individual, in antithesis to society. For he and they, the individual and society, are two opposing worlds. "Contempt" (בוז) is one of his favorite words, and he flings it like a javelin at his opponents on every occasion. It is the instrument of his vengeance.

He is conscious of his uniqueness and his superiority. "I sinned against mankind: I was born full statured," but he beats his breast in penance: "I sinned in height, I am guilty of depth." Talking of a tree he writes: "It is dying, it is asphyxiated in the stifling air like a Leviathan thrust out upon the dry land." The tree is portrayed strikingly in contrast to man (man's feet are on the ground and his head is in the air, but the tree has its head within the earth and it thrusts its limbed branches out like fingers towards the sky). One may say the same concerning Almon (the hero of the poem, i.e., Schneur himself), who, like Leviathan, is thrust out upon the dry land. The denizens of terra-firma are busy regimenting life. They are the inveterate enemies of the individual, of the elect, of the searching soul. Their intention is to chill the fire of the individual, to extinguish his unique light. They fear every new idea. They dread every daring step. In every attempt to create, they see blasphemy, sacrilege.

This is the reason for his enmity against them, for his revolt against them. He scoffs at them and their little dreams, and in unison with the red poppy-folk (in his fiery poem "Poppies"), ablaze with passion and rebellion, he proclaims: "Long live evil!"

He scoff's at their messianic visions (in his poem "In the End of Days"). How can the wolf live in peace with the lamb when they are two hostile elements, victor and vanquished, devourer and devoured who sustain the precarious balance of strife and struggle and the antinomies that are the very salt and pepper of life (פלפלת ההוויה)?

He is the poet of the יצר הרע (The Spirit of Evil) who lends color and vividness to the drab, conventional, bourgeoisie world of the יצר טוב (The Spirit of Good). The vision of the millenium in the above-mentioned poem is a naive lullaby of the יצר טוב but im-

plied in it is a Mephistophelean irony. For that messianic utopia is based upon a world completely free from evil. Such a world is not only totally impossible but altogether undesirable, for it will spell the end of struggle which is tantamount to the end of life itself.

The most arresting and intriguing aspects of Schneur's poetry are grounded in this inextricable mass of extremes and antitheses. He deals with a large array of conflicts: Thirst and drunkenness, hatred and love, the power that builds and the power that destroys, woman and man, nature and humanity, Satan and God, heresy and faith shadow and light. In these dualities, precedence is always given to the negative, the evil, the demonic. It is not love and hatred but hatred and love, not God versus Satan but Satan versus God, not faith and heresy but heresy and faith, etc. His course leads from negation towards affirmation. First hate, first Satan, first shadow and then afterwards come love, God, and light.

Thus the poet of hunger and of thirst who started on a note of destructiveness and youthful pessimism, achieves a level of life's fulness and intoxication that finally brings him the ecstasy and happiness that go with the positive and the constructive. Thus too, we see that the poet of hate, of the weak, the effeminate, finally becomes the poet of love for and worship of the woman, the eternal source and secret of beauty and longing and the will to create. And again, we find the poet of heresy, who Luciferlike storms the citadel of the Lord, essentially in the very depth of his being passionately religious and worshipful.

His enemies, the multitude who failed to understand him, believe in dead scrolls. Their professions of faith deal with musty, stagnant sanctities. He seeks the living God. Their life is a constant preparation for that whose very essence is futility, while he strains with impatience to his heart's desire. They dream of a world to come. For him this must be the coveted world. All keep on postponing the satisfaction of their love, their happiness, their joy. "For when are you putting it off?" asks the poet with wrath and impatience.

"Once upon a time"—thus the petty, terror-stricken mannikins of today find their consolation in the great and heroic deeds of the past. If that does not suffice to induce complete complacency, they bolster up their lives with visions of the future, the *aharit hayamim.*" Has the present no claims of its own?

Has the power of creation departed from us? Has God's blessing deserted us? Was it given only to our forefathers to make laws or create patterns? Has posterity alone the right to happiness and belief while we are accursed with sterility? And in many of his longer poems—"Under the Strains of the Mandolin," "On the Shores of the Seine," "In the End of Days," "The Vision of Silence," "I Shall Never Forgive," "Periods," "Songs of Destiny"—he rises to the full stature of a Prometheus in conflict, of an unbeliever who wrestles not only with his fellow-men but with God himself on behalf of man and on behalf of God.

He is the enemy of the people who is consumed with the love of his brethren. But he cannot tolerate their pettiness, their cowardice, their abjectness. Hence his untiring exhortations.

He is an agnostic, who seeks God in every drop of life, in every tear, in every heart, in every process of nature, in the destiny of man, nation, world. But it irks him to see how the great flame of the spirit has been broken into tiny, flickering, dying sparks and how the living and creative God has been reduced to a mouldering scroll that lies hidden in the ark.

Although he hesitates to display his religiosity and soft and tender lyricism, his prayerful mood and resigned submissiveness to God, such poems as "Prayer," "Evening Song," "Bridges," "An Hour of Weakness," "Visions," "Prayers of Man," and "Song of Sorrow," and many others in the collection of "Wood Notes" have come from his pen, and reveal the blasphemous Schneur in a different light. Schneur, however, is not the poet who

effervesces and then settles down, who seeks and then retires as one who has achieved his goal. Were this the case, Schneur would not have been the poet he is. He is the poet of abundance, multi-colored and polyphonic; the poet of eternal quest and unsilenceable unrest. A list of his themes and subjects, their multiplicity and range, is enough to convince one of his remarkable versatility.

An analysis of his style, its vocabulary and rhythm, its imagery and rich suggestiveness, its tangibility and resonance, leads one to the unalterable conviction that Schneur is a poet of the first magnitude. He hurdles every obstacle. His entire universe is permeated by his restlessness. He is never abstract. He is the most vital and earthbound poet in neo-Hebrew literature. His world is a world of flesh and blood, and his images are three dimensional. He is sculpturesque; his pictures are aquiver with life, with reality. Even the philosophic element in his poetry—an element of impressive importance—is vital, colorful, and intense. He bristles with ideas, but his ideas are clothed, incarnated, and made luminous with form and feeling. When, in his "Song of Destiny," he accompanies the gold-diggers into the gold-mines and the pearl-divers to the bottom of the sea, and the men-of-spirit into the depths and distances of their domain, he is lost and bedazzled. The first are aglitter with the glint of gold, the second are lighted with the soft glow of pearls, the third are filled with vastness and loneliness and tragedy. The secret and the sorrow of the individual blaze a path in the depth of the earth or the depth of the sea or the depth of the soul. They give us the clue to the mystery of life. Thus it is that even in "The Mountains," where everything is so lucid and so near to God, where the ethereal predominates over the earthly, where even he finds the air too attenuated, and where all is entangled in the magic skein of truth and falsehood, life and death, being and unbeing, even there his human bonds prevent him from being lost in the clouds.

Schneur is the poet of a ripe world, a world spreading like a field covered not with the gold of grain but with the gold of genius, lifting apples of fire and wisdom. „בסולם אלהים!" His is a world of wrath and wisdom, trembling on the threshold of new discoveries or upon the brink of collapse, burning with negation on horizon's rim and the twilight of declining mankind, jadedly glutted with triumphs and conquests and languishing for love of woman, unconquered and unconquerable.

This is the crown of his silvering head:

„הלואי תראוני ככה מעפיל ונשרף
תפוח אש ושכל

"Would you may see me ascend and
take fire
Upon the ladder of God."

Upon this flaming ladder, every rung of which is an ascending step of sin, woman, love, world, and God, Schneur mounts heavenward, hungry and thirsty, sinful and God-intoxicated, hating and loving, defying and entreating.

Reconstructing the Jewish Past

By Eugene Kohn

EVERY generation has the task, not merely of transforming the conditions under which it lives and thus determining the future, but also, as a means to this end, of reconstructing the past. When times change, it is not only our present and our outlook on the future that change, but likewise our understanding of the past. Jewish history today differs from Jewish history of a century ago, not solely by the addition of a new chapter covering the events from 1837 to 1937, but by an entirely different approach to the whole sweep of events from the first emergence of our people in the historic arena to those incidents that figure as items of current news. According to the unphilosophic notions of uneducated people, history is whatever has happened in the past, and the sole task of the historian is to discover and record what has happened. When it is pointed out to such people that a whole library would not suffice to record all the daily occurrences in the life of even a single individual, they will of course admit that history must confine itself to *important* events. But they fail to realize that this raises such questions as: important to whom? important for what?

Against this notion that history is merely an objective record of facts whose importance is intrinsic and self-evident, there is the dictum ascribed to Napoleon: "History is a lie agreed upon." Unfortunately, this cynical estimate of the work of historians is justified when applied to many allegedly historical texts that are compiled in the interest of some specific nationalist or religious propaganda. It is not true, however, of history writing in general. There is such a thing as fact, for which every historian worthy of the name has profound respect, but what makes a past event an historical fact is not the mere circumstances of its having taken place, but its capacity to satisfy a present curiosity about the past. It must help to answer the question that sent us in search of it. The author of the Biblical Book of Kings, who recalls all the detailed traditions about the prophets, Elijah and Elisha, including miracles performed by them in the interest of individuals, disposes of the politically important reign of Omri in five verses. He looked to history to illustrate the relation of God to His people; therefore, "the rest of the acts of Omri which he did, and his might that he showed" are of no historic importance for him and he refers the reader who may be curious about them to "the book of the Chronicles of the Kings of Israel." Historic objectivity consists in not concealing or distorting facts that are relevant to the author's inquiry, but what he finds in history will always be conditioned by what he seeks in it, by the interest that prompts his investigation. Consequently, every significant epoch in a people's history calls for a rewriting of that history. Confronted with an unprecedented situation, a people does well to consult its past for any help previous experience may afford for the solution of present problems.

Such a comprehensive revaluation of the Jewish past has made its appearance in our day in *A Social and Religious History of the Jews,* by Salo Baron.* Not since Graetz wrote his monumental *History of the Jews,* has a work appeared that so completely re-examines the sources of Jewish history and rearranges the facts in an intelligible pattern from the point of view of a modern outlook on life. Until now, the figure of Graetz has dominated Jewish historiography. Subsequent works like those of Margolis and Marx, Sacher, and Kastein, may have corrected details in Graetz's version and

*A Social and Religious History of the Jews, by Salo Wittmayer Baron, three volumes, Columbia University Press, 1937.

may have availed themselves of material that has only come to light since his time, but one does not feel in reading these works that they represent a comprehensive effort to examine afresh all the relevant data and to draw new inferences from them. One does feel this when one reads Baron's book.

The need for such a fresh approach to Jewish history certainly exists. When Graetz wrote his great work, the period of Jewish emancipation had not yet given way to the era of anti-Semitism on the one hand and Jewish nationalism on the other. It seemed reasonable at that time to suppose that Judaism would adapt itself to its new status by integrating the Jews in the national life of the peoples among whom they lived except in respect to their religious ideology and the institutions designed to express it. What seemed important for Jews of that era in respect to their past was to understand how the Jew came to think as he did about religion. The Jew felt the need to justify his existence by showing that history made him the heir of religious ideas which are inherently valid and which Jewish life must be organized to implement. In consequence, Jewish history tended to be a history of Jewish thought, a record and evaluation of the contributions of prophets, law-givers, teachers, philosophers, poets, saints and martyrs to the development of that thought. The central problem of Jewish history was the justification of Jewish survival. History was subordinated, consciously or unconsciously, to apologetics.

The modern interest in the Jewish past is different. Bitter experience has taught us that the difficulties in which we find ourselves as Jews are mostly irrelevant to the validity of whatever opinions about God and the world we may have come to hold as a result of our experience. The world in general has learned to discount the theories by which men rationalize their conduct. These no longer seem as potent as they formerly seemed in determining the actual course of events. The idea is widespread that the more or less blind reaction of men to their physical and social environment in the pursuit of their economic wants affords a better clue to an understanding of history than do the ethical and religious doctrines of prophets and sages. Psychology has made us increasingly aware of the dominant part played by the subconscious in human behavior, whether in the behavior of men or of nations. Progress in the comparative method of studying different types of civilization has made us realize more clearly than in Graetz's time how inherited culture patterns condition the thinking and acting of men in society. Above all, in a world in which blind and savage forces threaten to engulf civilization itself in their internecine conflicts, the problem that engages the Jewish historian is, not how to justify Jewish survival, but how to effect Jewish survival and a satisfactory Jewish life. With this in view, the modern Jewish historian estimates, in every age and every crisis in the long and eventful career of our people, the circumstances and conditions that cooperated to favor its survival and free development and those that conspired to impede them. This is the task to which Dr. Baron addresses himself.

No reviewer is qualified to pass judgment on all the interpretatiions of the author unless he engages in as profound a research into the original sources as the author himself engaged in. That would be a tremendous task, for the entire third volume, except for the index, is taken up with bibliography and copious references on every minute point discussed in the work itself. These references cover every literature and are written in every language of the countries in which the Jew has made history. But it requires no laborious study to appreciate, not merely the breadth of erudition displayed by the author, but the objectivity of his approach in weighing evidence and his penetrating analyses of historic situations.

The great danger into which a historian is likely to fall is that of over-simplification. Since it is necessary to select for presentation only certain of the

more significant events, personalities and circumstances that determine the direction of human affairs, it is a natural tendency to ascribe a prepotent influence to some particular series of cause and effect relations in which one is interested to the exclusion of all others. We have seen that Graetz, for example, was prone to emphasize the importance of the ideological factor in history and to ignore such factors as economic determination, technological changes, population statistics, and the like. Other historians sometimes err in other directions, trying to explain all phenomena in economic terms, or in terms of race, or what not. But when we bear in mind that life, in the historic epochs of the past, was, to the generation then alive, the same complex and manifold affair that it is to us today, we realize that to describe it in terms of a single causal series of events, whether religious, economic, biological or sociological, is to oversimplify and falsify it. History is not the result of a single operating cause, but the resultant of many operating causes that often work at cross-purpose. The historian, therefore, in trying to reduce the chaos of conditions and events to some degree of order which shall yield a meaning to us today, must always be aware of the principle of polarity, the principle that a single effect often results from the combined operation of two contrary causes.

Is history a result of economic determinism or of idealistic motivation? The wise historian will reject the dilemma and show the economic factors and the idealistic factors at work in each successive situation. Is history, as Carlisle puts it, "the biography of great men," or is it the arena of impersonal social forces of which the individual hero is merely symbolic and representative? Again, the historian will not be drawn into a categorical answer, but will be alert to study both the influence of men on their times and the influence of their times on men. In Jewish history there are many special polarities. Has nationalism or universalism been the key-note of the Jewish way of life? Is Jewish culture secular or religious? Has the diaspora or Palestine been the dominant factor in the making of the Jew and his civilization? Is Jewish survival due to an imposed segregation or to organic social forces operating within the Jewish community? These are but a few of the polarities with which the Jewish historian must reckon. In their popular thinking about Jewish history, preachers and propagandists are prone to emphasize one or the other of these poles and ignore its contrary, To the credit of Dr. Baron as a historian goes his careful avoidance of this common fallacy.

The result is that he enables the reader to see, in the complex forces that have woven the pattern of Jewish life in the past, forces that are also operative today though not in the same proportion or the same mutual relationship. We can see where our contemporary situation resembles and where it differs from that of each historic epoch as it passes in review before us. When, therefore, our author, in his last chapter entitled Epilogue, gives us his considered judgment of the situation in which the Jewish people finds itself today, his suggestions are worthy of more than passing consideration. They are the result of a deep pondering on the many complicated elements that have gone into the making of present-day Jewish life.

To those of us who take the Reconstructionist point of view, this book gives great encouragement. True, the author does not deal with the Reconstructionist movement as such, for it is as yet too embryonic to have been born into the light of history. He apparently regards Reconstructionism as one of the many variant versions of Conservatism, for he refers to its founder, Dr. Kaplan, as "in many ways one of Conservative Judaism's foremost exponents." Nevertheless, he draws conclusions from his study of Jewish history that are thoroughly consonant with the Reconstructionist platform. That platform teaches that Judaism is a religious civilization; that that civilization needs to be radically reconstructed to meet the crisis of modern times; that such

reconstruction must conform to an outlook at once nationalistic and ethically universal, cultural in the secular sense and religious, stressing the importance of the national home in Palestine and of the organization of Jewish community life in the diaspora; and that Jewish civilization shall represent a collective contribution of the Jewish people to a world-order designed to reconcile international cooperation with national cultural autonomy and with personal liberty. Every one of these affirmations received support in the Epilogue of Baron's history. Indeed most of them are included in his final summary from which we quote the following excerpt:

"The Jewish people and their religion *are* going to survive the present extraordinary crisis. The unique interlocking of Jewish religion and nationality, in fact, offers even greater impregnability than the purely religious safeguards of the other denominations. Just as, in the former religious-minded ages, the Jewish faith has often saved the Jewish nation from imminent extinction, so will, in the present nationalist period, the Jewish ethnos rescue the Jewish religion. Before our very eyes, the neo-messianic hope, surging higher and higher toward Zion, has tremendously fortified Judaism also in its momentous struggle for survival in the dispersion. . . . Although trying to retain the precious heritage of the nineteenth century, they (i.e. the leaders) must take a more critical view of the effects of emancipation and think much more in postemancipatory terms. Through their entire history inescapably linked with the ideals of social justice, peace and the brotherhood of men, the Jewish people must none the less work out their essentially non-political destinies in independence of prevalent political trends, liberal or conservative, communist or fascist. But they must never surrender their humanitarian aspiration to any kind of jingoistic nationalism, no matter how great the tempation within or the pressure without. They must also rebuild their ethnic, communal and religious life on new foundations. Western Judaism especially must be revitalized, through culture and education, as a value of affirmation rather than be allowed to vegetate as a sort of 'inverted Marranism.' Jewish unity, insofar as it is at all possible in such a dispersed and diversified people, must be built around these positive principles, much more than around negative and purely defensive aims.

"The religious Jews in particular. . . . must reread their profession of faith in the light of both past history and present needs, thus retaining historic continuity in the midst of most radical adaptations; and they must reestablish that firm *link* between the individual and the community which alone can reawaken in each Jew the sense of discipline and spontaneous obedience to the supreme postulates of his people's destiny. Like Deutero-Isaiah and his disciples among the psalmists during Israel's emergence from the crisis of the Exile, the religious leaders of our postemancipatory age must be ready to 'sing unto the Lord a new song,' new and appropriate to the great historic epoch which has just begun. But even more than at that juncture, the 'new things' and the 'former things' (*hadashot* and *rishonot*), so often vividly contrasted by the exalted poet-prophet, must now subtly intermingle in the great stream of Jewish social and religious history."

It is to be hoped that Dr. Baron's work, authoritative and reliable as it is, will be the starting point for a renewed interest in the Jewish past and renewed activity in the writing of Jewish history. The extremely condensed form of his work, which takes only two volumes of text to almost a complete volume of bibliography and references, is admirable for satisfying the needs of scholars who already possess something of a philosophic approach to history and a general knowledge of historic movements sufficient to enable them to comprehend an allusion without elaborate exposition. But there is still room for a popularization of the subject written with a view to aiding the imagination of the average reader to en-

ter into the historic life of the Jewish people emotionally as well as intellectually. Historiography is an art as well as a science, and the present work, though not lacking in artistic merit, is less conspicuously successful from the literary than from the scientific and philosophical standpoint. But whatever work may be done in the near future in the field of Jewish history will have to reckon with Baron's *Social and Religious History of the Jews.* Writers in this field will probably take his contribution as the classic text which their own labors will seek to supplement, correct, or clarify until such a time as the changes that have taken place in the historic situation of the Jewish people shall again require a revaluation of the entire Jewish past from a new standpoint.

Correspondence

The New Prayer Book

Sirs:

That a new prayer book is needed can be accepted as axiomatic, but that any prayer book arranged by one rabbi will of necessity be the desirable one does not follow.

In his review of Rabbi Silverman's prayer book, Rabbi Routtenberg points out that the services at the three hundred or more Conservative synagogues throughout the country are "characterized by greatly varying and oftimes conflicting rituals," yet he accepts one of these services as a "serious and earnest attempt to introduce a unifying force in the widely divergent service rituals that prevail in the Conservative congregations."

May I submit that no one individual's impression of what constitutes a proper or desirable service should prevail. Such are at best suggestions, not conclusions. Before we can embark on the preparation of a prayer book, acceptable to more than a handful of synagogues, it is necessary to establish certain *criteria,* desiderata which are, and should be, at the basis of so important a project. Failure to have criteria in mind will result in the type of criticism leveled by the reviewer at the *Sabbath and Festival Prayer Book.*

The first step in that direction would be the appointment of a Commission to prepare a preliminary questionnaire on the existing prayer book. This questionnaire should be circularized among the spiritual leaders and scholars in the Conservative Synagogue. On the basis of replies received, a list of specifications for the prayer book can be drawn up. Procedure of this kind would bring about more objectivity in the choice of content for the prayer book of today. Surely, this type of approach will more truly represent a "serious and earnest attempt to introduce a unifying force in the widely divergent service rituals that prevail in the Conservative congregations."

I. DAVID SATLOW

January 13, 1938
New York

Defending Democracy

Sirs:

At our bi-monthly meeting of the Reconstructionist Group of this city, at which meetings the problems of Reconstructionism are discussed, your editorial in the January 14th issue entitled "Defend Democracy With Other Americans" was the subject of great argument. Suffice it to say, in brief, that it was the unanimous opinion of those present that you were considered to be in grave error in maintaining the stand you did. The task of presenting our criticisms was left to me, which criticisms are expressed herewith.

Analyzing your editorial, one finds that it is composed of four distinct parts. First, there is the statement of the case in which the director of the Jewish Community Center in Jersey City was overridden in his objection to canceling the appearance on that Jewish Community Center Forum of Mr. Roger Baldwin. Said cancellation was effected by the Jewish Community Center Board. The reason for said cancellation was the fact that Mayor Hague of Jersey City, in expressing what you assume to be the opinion of various organizations of that city, had objected to the expression of the opinions of that group which Mr. Baldwin represents.

The second point is that on your first impulse you wished to condemn the Board "unequivocally." Your grounds for this attitude were that Jewish tradition "stands in sharp contradiction to any system of government that elevates the rights of property over the rights of human life," and that "Jewish rights rest on a democratic conception of American citizenship which recognizes the rights of all minorities."

The third point begins to develop your negative attitude to this problem in which first, you state that if the Jewish Communiy Center presented Mr. Baldwin it would feed the myth of the identity between Jews and Communists. Further developing this point, you say that Jews must not isolate themselves from other "progressive" Americans and fight as an exposed minority.

Your last point is one that affects the Jewish Community Center as a whole, namely, you claim that a Jewish Center Forum should present only speakers who have a "Jewish message for its Jewish audience."

Answering these points one by one, we feel that your second point was a concrete expression of the true principles of Jewish thought with respect to social justice and American democracy. It is with the third and fourth points that we find ourselves in utter disagreement.

In the first place, you intimate that because there has been no American group in that city that is willing to fight for free speech, it ill behooves the Jewish Community Center to be conspicuous by so doing. Here again, you are betraying the principles of your movement. Because there is no group in that community that does not want to voice liberal opinions, it is incumbent upon the Jewish Community Center as a moral obligation to give its platform to a man who expresses the opinion of liberalism. In other words, according to you, the Jewish Community Center should only express liberal opinions when it is healthy, and otherwise remain silent. This may be justified only on the grounds of sheer opportunism, and can have no place in modern Jewish life. Especially, as the Reconstructionist Movement strives to remove those excrescences that similar cases of opportunism have created.

In the second place, you propose the thesis that a Jewish Community Center should offer only speakers with a Jewish message to a Jewish audience. To us, this thesis can only be accepted on the premise that as a *Jewish* Community Center, it has certain problems all its own. Following this line of thought, as you imply, the Jews should not isolate themselves from American life, but should adopt other instrumentalities to do so. It seems to us that this argument contains a fundamental misconception of the function of the Jewish Community Center. Brifely put, the function of the Jewish Community Center is to interpret Jewish life in such a fashion as to fit it into the general framework of American democracy. As Mordecai Kaplan himself states in "Judaism As A Civilization," "It tries to minister to all the social and recreational needs of the Jew, and to call forth and meet his higher cultural needs.

"It offers the best that can be obtained in education, music, art and literature. . . . Its avowed aim is to furnish a common meeting ground for all the Jews of the community and maintain those activities which would contribute to their welfare and development and to the strengthening of their Jewish consciousness as a constructive force in American life." (Page 54).

The implicit thesis of your argument in the editorial would deny this entire conception, for instead of discussing those problems that fundamentally concern the Jew in America today, the question of civil liberties, you would have us lapse into an intellectual ghetto with a myriad of Ludwig Lewisohn talks on Chassidism and the Haskalah. Strangely enough, in the editorial on the American Jewish Historical Society, you condemn just such an "academic" approach that will be ultimately meaningless to the modern Jew.

And when you go on to say that the struggle for the preservation of American democracy is not a Jewish problem, you are propounding a very vicious theory. Carried to its logical conclusion, assuming the Reconstructionist definition of a minority group, the fight for democracy is not a Catholic problem either, and it becomes the sole prerogative of the Protestant Americans to feel that they alone are justified in fighting for Democracy, at least to fight for it without feeling any qualms of conscience as to prior duty. It is our opinion that as an institution in America, and primarily as a *Jewish institution,* the Jewish Community Center should sponsor such activities as make for a more fruitful life of its constituent members. In effect, the response to your thesis is that of Whistler's to a visitor to an art gallery who saw his painting entitled "A Study in Grey." Since the color grey was relatively little used someone asked as to the title. Whistler responded, "When you hear the 'Melody in F', do you expect to hear the note F all the time?" Correspondingly, does a Jewish institution have to present only *Jewish* problems in the sense that they deal with unique matters of Jewish interest? You yourself state that the life of the modern Jew is taken up with matters non-Jewish. Are we to permit the Jewish community to feel that these matters cannot be dealt with in a Jewish institution, thus permitting for a divorce between American and Jewish life? All this is implicit in your major premise, and in this it is our opinion that you are in grave error.

To those of us in Center work, the ideal of integrating Jewish life into the American scene with a minimum of friction and a maximum of enjoyment is a fundamental requisite for a normal Jewish life. The Jewish Community Center is an American-Jewish institution; Janus-faced it approaches the Jewish community as an integrating communal force, and, as an American institution, it functions as an expression of that force to the American people. To ask it to do otherwise is to betray the principle of democracy, which is not that of seclusion but active cooperation with other minority groups.

Jewish thought is presented not to emphasize difference, but to provide stimulus for group-consciousness aimed towards successful group adaptation rather than individual assimilation. We aim to be Jews in America, and as such, American Jews. To emphasize one to the detriment of the other is to court on the one hand group suicide and on the other hand, an unhealthy community. The synthesis is the aim of the Center; to claim less is to be lacking in the prime quality of social thought, the leading of a happy, contented life within a specific group.

IRVING LEVITAS

January 14, 1938
Kansas City, Mo.